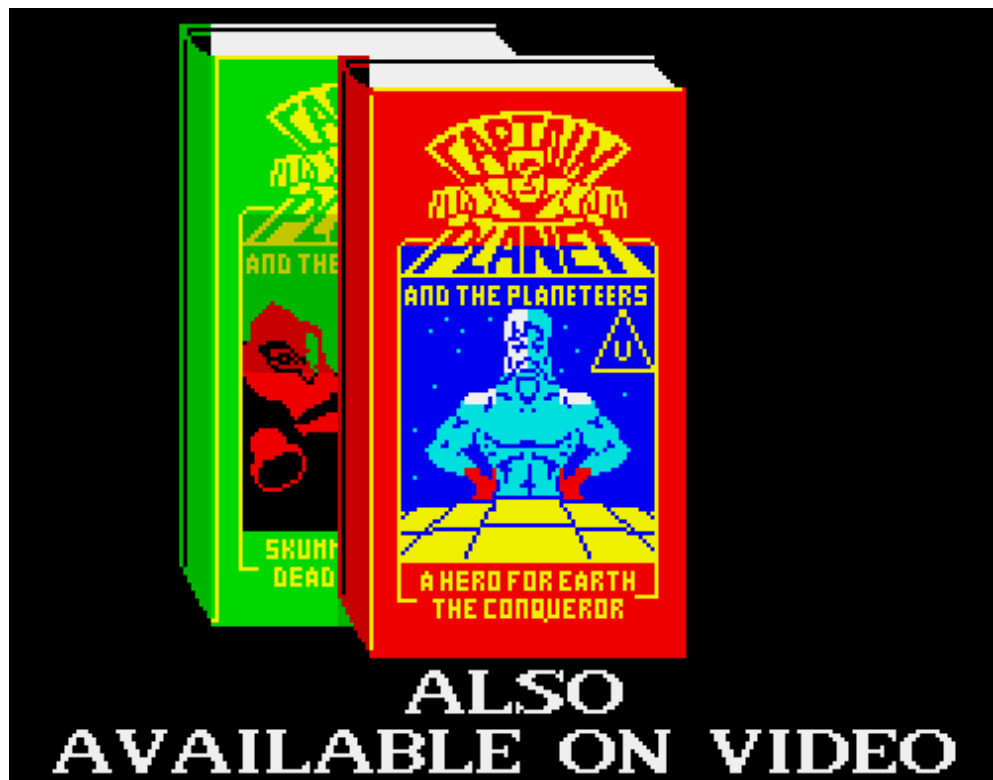


You've got me. Who's got you

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

"Captain Planet, he's our hero. Gonna take pollution down to zero." ...and that was just the beginning for the lycra-clad goody-two-shoes cartoon superhero inspired by DC Comics' Captain Atom and the Marvel series, Psi-Force. Believe it or not, he's also notorious for attempting to educate the world's impressionable young minds on the dangers of succumbing to gang culture, drug abuse, discriminating against HIV sufferers, a lack of population control, and even travelling back in time to sell an atomic bomb to that despotic rascal Hitler.



That's not the end of the exhaustive list by any means, I just paused for breath. Captain Planet put in his two penneth worth on every conceivable social, political and religious issue; from slavery, the Israeli-Palestine conflict, safe sex, 'The Troubles' in Ireland, to Apartheid. And just when you think school's out, there's the Jerry Springer-esque 'thought for the day' that wraps up every episode.

No quandary was off limits, and the multicoloured gymnast had a ready solution to them all, many of which could be neatly expressed in an easily digestible one-liner.

Magnanimous, humanitarian doctrines which back in 1991 a cavalcade of celebs were falling over themselves to champion for the benefit of the planet and society's moral compass. That and the cache feathering their green credentials would confer of course. When it's the height of trendiness to rail against diesel fumes and inequality, you may as well do it on national TV.



Spanning its implausibly protracted six season run, a total of 111 voice actors were involved in the production of Captain Planet and the Planeteers including A list heavyweights such as Whoopi Goldberg, Tim Curry, Margot Kidder, Elizabeth Taylor, James Coburn, Meg Ryan, Martin Sheen, Jeff Goldblum, Sting, Malcolm McDowell, Danny Glover, and Kevin Arnold of The Wonder Years fame! ...who I believe goes by the name Fred Savage now he's all grown up.

At one point even Tom Cruise was on board to take the lead role, which was instead ultimately awarded to the far less high profile, David Coburn (no relation to 'cool cowboy' James incidentally). Whoever pitched the prospect to this star-studded roster deserves an Oscar! I expect these days they're selling sandpits to Arabs.

If you'd only dipped into the show mid-run it wasn't too taxing to get the gist, not least because the simple précis

was recapped in the introduction to each episode (and in the sixth and final season eco-rapped by B-52's frontman, Fred Schneider!)...

"Our world is in peril. Gaia, the spirit of the Earth*, can no longer stand the terrible destruction plaguing our planet. She gives five magic rings to five special young people. From Africa, Kwame with the power of earth. From the North America, Wheeler with the power of fire. From the Soviet Union**, Linka with the power of wind. From Asia, Gi with the power of water and from South America, Ma-Ti with the power of heart. With the five powers combined they summon earth's greatest champion - CAPTAIN PLANET!***

*Voiced by Whoopi Goldberg and later Margot Kidder.

**Following the fall of the Soviet Union, Linka was later said to originate from 'Eastern Europe' thanks to the magic of audio dubbing.

***Unfortunately when the big cheese borrows their magic tricks, they aren't able to use them simultaneously, so you can imagine what an inconvenience that must be when the Spandex eco-warrior is out of action too.

****This isn't a EULA and small print is really annoying so I'm going to call it a day now.

As an animated ecological edutainment vehicle (the world's first in fact) it was about as subtle as being mowed down by a solar-powered nut roast delivery truck. Where the cartoon manifested the initial hit and run, the accompanying games that followed reversed over their unsuspecting, tender target audience to finish the job.

The philanthropic double-whammy clearly did the trick because pollution, violence, overpopulation and debilitating illnesses are nought but a distant memory today. Thank Ted for that!

"We're the planetees, You can be one too! 'Cause saving our planet is the thing to do, Looting and polluting is not the way, Hear what Captain Planet has to say: THE POWER IS YOURS!!"



As vogueish as it to bash the cheesy outmoded show in frothy-mouthed YouTube videos, its heart was in the right place even if the morality it espoused was dumbed down and misguided at times. Admirable tutelage such as the benefits of pooling resources to achieve shared goals, the importance of equality in our mixing pot global community and eco-friendly awareness were always at the core of each episode. If you could sell a few *sustainable* posable figurines,

backpacks, lunch boxes and computer games in the process and channel that money back into supporting good causes then who would argue with that?

Well, I suppose the same cynics who would have us believe that Captain Planet co-creator, Ted Turner (aka the cameo-tastic Fred Lerner), is some kind of dark overlord with a hidden agenda merely on account of him being a billionaire with a massive controlling share in the media business. Like, don't impose your emotional pollution on me, bro.

Incidentally it's interesting to compare and contrast opinions of the other half of the creative partnership, executive producer and philanthropist of the highest order, Barbara Pyle (who *isn't* renowned for being a wealthy media mogul, yet *does* sing from the same hymn sheet as Ted).

Courtesy of publisher, Mindscape, Captain Planet's video game reach extended to the NES, Spectrum, Amstrad, Mega Drive, Amiga and Atari ST platforms between 1991 and 1992, each propounding a different approach to the licensed action game genre. The C64 port is unique in that it doesn't exist.



In the three level Spectrum and Amstrad versions by David Perry and Nick Bruty you embrace the role of just our esteemed leader in a side-scrolling shoot 'em up where you fly with the manual dexterity of any sci-fi spaceship more traditionally encountered in this genre. Shooting baddies causes them to explode in a confetti stream of hearts, while each stage is wrapped up with a guardian clash.



Bonus levels are designed in the guise of a Space Harrier clone. Your goal is to fly into the screen collecting clocks while avoiding a head on collision with any stars.





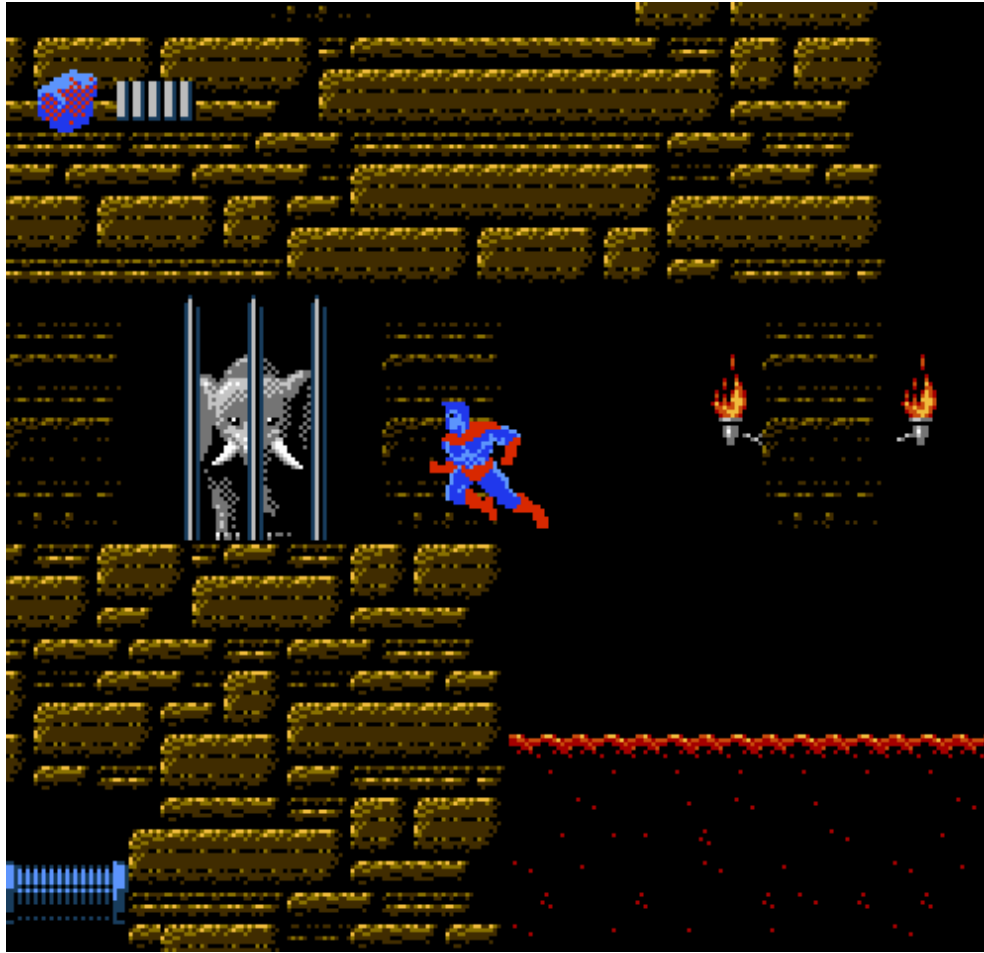
The game can be completed in under fifteen minutes so hardly an epic production.

"Congratulations! You made it Captain, but your score was pretty lousy - try again!"

Over on the Mega Drive, Captain Planet by NovaLogic, Inc. represents a bog standard traditional platformer where you play as a different Planeteer on every level, each culminating in an eco-villain boss brawl.



NES owners were 'treated' to a slightly more varied side scrolling insta-death experience courtesy of Chris Gray Enterprises Inc. involving internal and external settings and a selection of vehicles to fly or drive. You can step into the shoes of any of the good guys from the 'toon.



Our Amiga version manages to capture the overly optimistic, world-saving essence of the show by focusing on the multifarious ways in which you can approach a dilemma, calling upon the idiosyncratic strengths of each individual character. Coded by Tony 'Ratt*' Crowther with graphics and music provided by Jason Kingsley and Ben Daglish respectively, it was thrown together in just 30 days to meet the deadline for inclusion in the £399 Cartoon Classics A500+ pack brought to market in July 1991. This was on sale until September of the following year, also batched together with The Simpsons: Bart vs. the Space Mutants, Lemmings and Deluxe Paint III, and was at the forefront of a national TV ad campaign.

It was certainly greeted like "Sunshine on a Rainy Day" by swathes of kids on the morning of December 25th.

Commodore had a good year too - the Cartoon Classics pastiche turned out to be the second best selling Amiga bundle, runner up to the iconic Batman pack of course.

*His old MUD nickname. See high score table trivia fans.

**Erm, when I said earlier I was going to quit it with the small print, I was telling fibs.

Tony was given free rein to interpret the source material as he saw fit, no brief was issued by Mindscape. Captain Planet was subsequently refined in terms of graphics, animation and gameplay and re-released in 1992 as a standalone game priced at £25.99. Nevertheless, it's the inaugural pack-in edition that many Amigans hold dear to their hearts because it's among the first games they played on the system as kids.

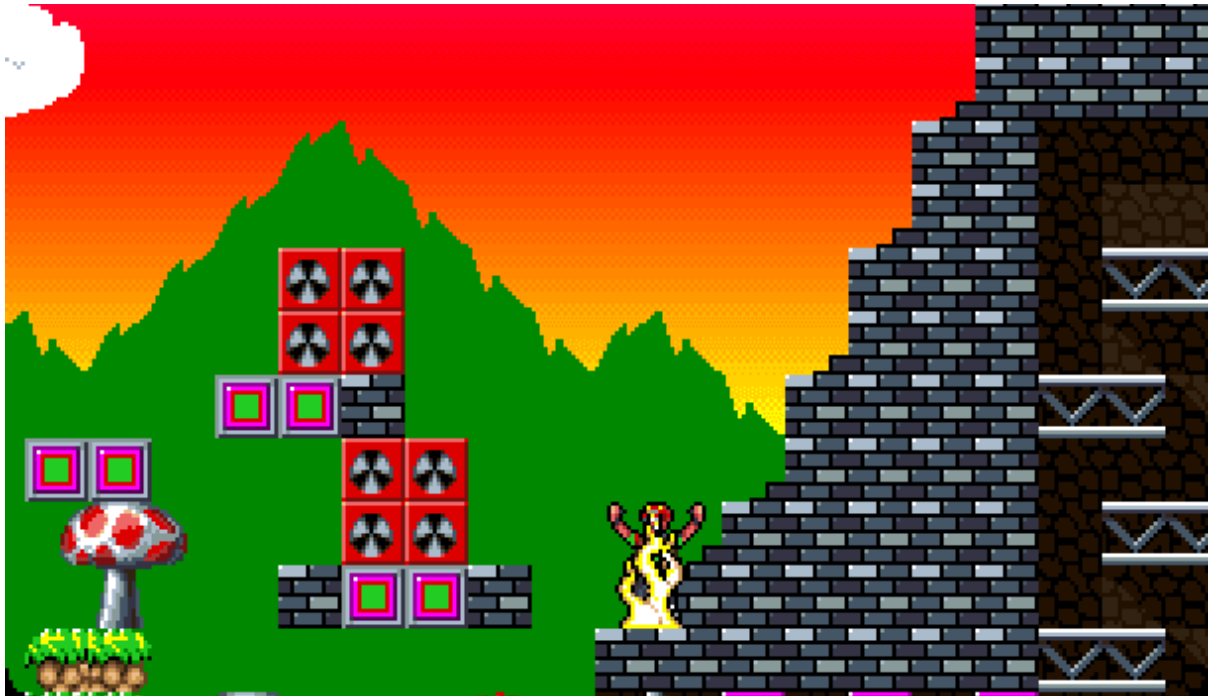
It features five levels you're obliged to tackle role-playing as one of the Planeteers, followed by a final dalliance with the eco-villains embodying the main man, Captain Planet himself, who can switch between his protégés' special abilities by collecting their respective power-up icons.

Standing between you and your chivalrous vocation are a motley rabble of evil-doers plucked straight from the 113 episode cartoon series, including Hoggish Greedly, Sly Sludge, Dr. Blight and her computer MAL, Looten Plunder, his assistant Argos Bleak, and Duke Nukem (a character who predates Apogee's game series of the same name).



To a degree, the stages - set in Yellowstone National Park, the Atlantic Ocean, Africa and Antarctica - can be attempted in a nonlinear fashion, and take inspiration from a hodgepodge of classic arcade titles such as Boulder Dash, Choplifter, and Mario.

The multifaceted objectives revolve around neutralising noxious effluent and rescuing an endangered animal species.



In Wheeler's stage, your task is to obliterate nuclear waste by torching toxic containers with your signature flame thrower, of all things. Strangely enough I can think of at least one good reason why that might not promote our cause.



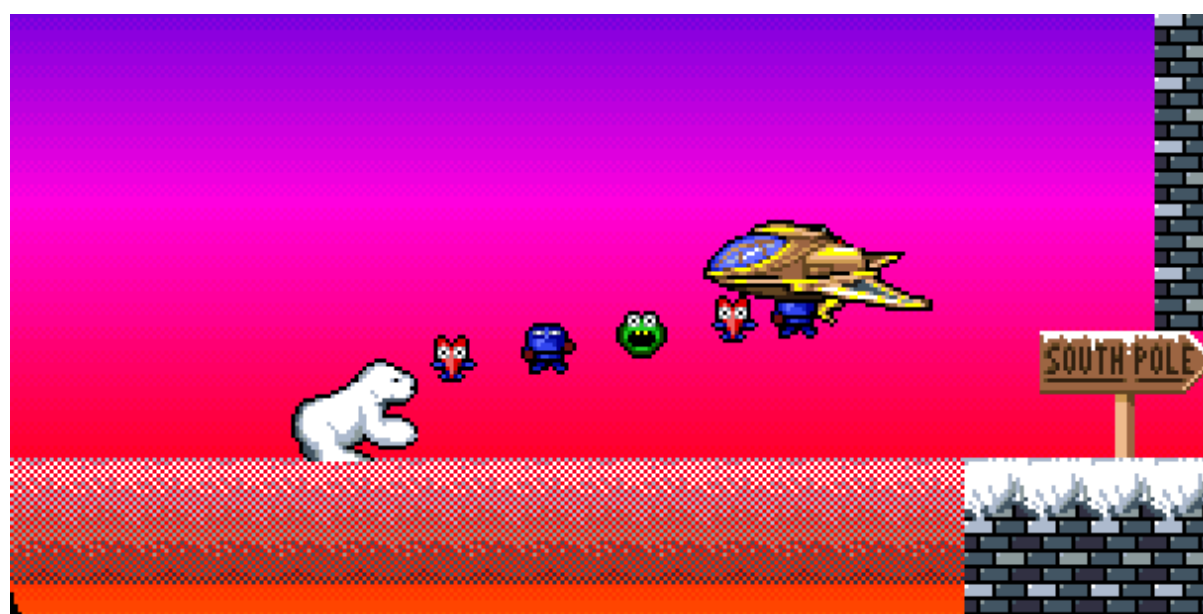
Our arsonist chum's failsafe (or should that be *fall*/safe?) device entails fabricating instant balloons to carry him back up to platforms after losing his footing.



Facilitating your exploration of the expansive levels, a range of transportation vehicles are at your disposal: the spaceship-like Geo-Cruiser, Eco-sub and Eco-copter. To stop any nitpickers dead in their tracks these run on solar power and so don't contribute to the pollution problem you're attempting to avert. Remember kids, be part of the *solution*, not the *pollution*! Given your Achilles heel is in fact pollution, it's not such bad advice.

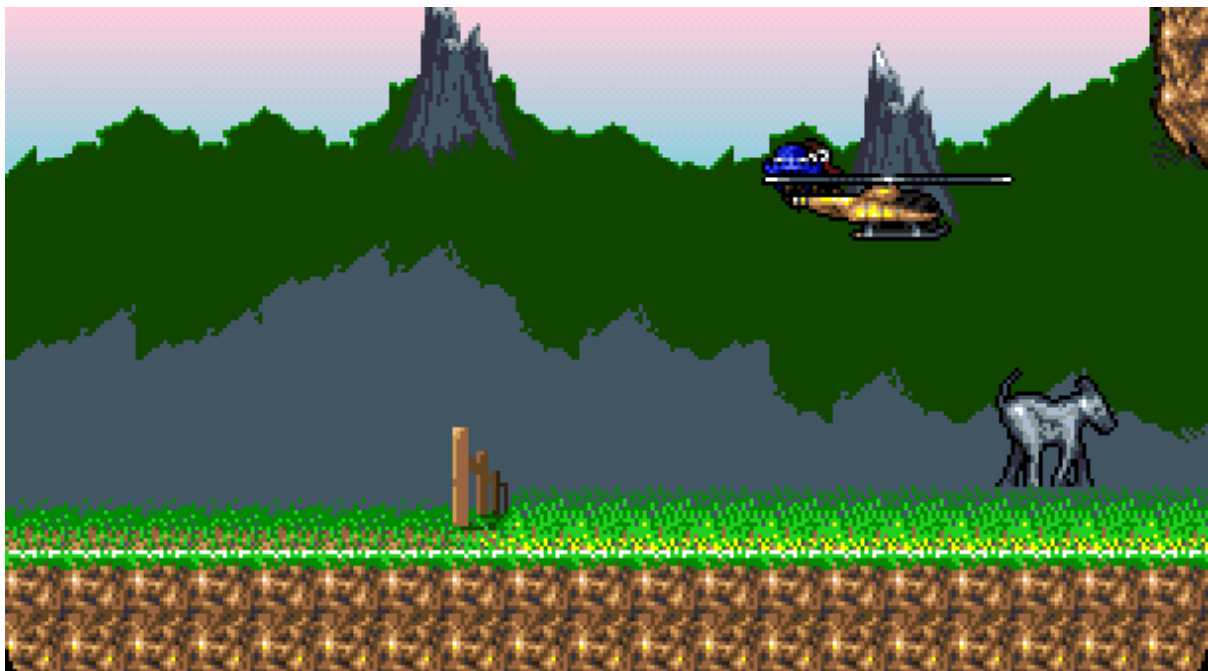


In another assignment I should really couch with a disclaimer for any physicists reading this, you have to destroy Sly Sludge's hot air balloons that are dropping deadly CFC gas onto the ozone layer and apply 'sticky plasters' to plug the gaps, thereby allowing seals (that look uncannily like baby polar bears) to cross to safety. Why they're hanging out this high up in the stratosphere in the first place is one of life's big mysteries we'll probably never get to the bottom of.



For those of you wondering what he had against the ozone layer, the plan was to allow the sun's scorching rays to penetrate through to the earth making it so inhospitable his hotels would fill up with patrons seeking refuge. Now that's thinking outside the box.

Sticking with the wildlife rescue mission theme, you're duly challenged to airlift 'pit ponies' from a life of toil, trapped in murky, infected caves "to their fields so that they may taste freedom once again". A noble cause I'm sure we would have accepted had the *dogs* been honest with us from the start. As disguises go I have to say I've seen more convincing examples.



Wind-powered Linka (insert your own gag here) embraces her hotline to mother nature by conjuring tornadoes at will to deflect enemies as well as propelling her into orbit like a jet pack. Her designation is to clear explosives and litter from around the sacred pyramids to salvage ancient Egyptian relics.



Gi's speciality is water, an element she harnesses to cast ice platforms in a manner highly reminiscent of Rainbow Islands. These allow her to climb to otherwise inaccessible areas and also cushion her fall like a butt-chilling slide. Rather than crumbling over time, these melt into the ether forcing you to step up the pace.



Homage queen, Gi, can also envelope enemies in an incapacitating, poppable bubble, sealing their fate in a manoeuvre not a million miles from a technique you may remember from Bubble Bobble.

And the parodies don't stop there - Gi can additionally deploy a two-way Turracan style sweeping curtain barrage of ice.



Once under water you must deploy your trusty Eco-sub to pick up toxic waste from the sea bed and deposit it on conveyer belts to carry it out of harm's way. When the sea is sufficiently detoxed you're all set to release the dolphins Looten Plunder has imprisoned in claustrophobic, high-rise water tanks.



Earthy Kwame fires monster boulders which serve as platforms, gap pluggers or weapons. They can also be pushed into place a la Boulder Dash.



Luuurrrve doctor, Ma-ti - not so elementally - projects hearts - spreading peace, kisses and understanding wherever he goes. These substitute for Growmore, causing plant life to immediately sprout new offshoots, creating living platforms, and reinvigorating the imperiled rainforest. Hearts also double as airbags to cushion any unintended treetop descents. You could say Ma-ti is passionate about safety.





Eradicating the topiary-terrorising incinerators, and airlifting to sanctuary captured elephants forms the basis of his remaining duties.

Meanwhile, drawing on their combined aptitudes and jewellery, the green mulleted head honcho is summoned into action to crush Duke 'Dean Stockwell' Nukem who is hellbent on unleashing an apocalyptic nuclear meltdown by absorbing the entirety of Radicore Industries' radioactive power plant energy. When he's not busy harassing innocent tree stumps that is.



Whenever you bump off an adversary, their mini-me joins a conga line procession that tracks your every move like a well-trained puppy. These don't serve any purpose other than to multiply any bonus points you accrue.

Regrettably, Captain Planet isn't the most polished platformer you'll encounter for the Amiga in that aspects of the gameplay we've come to take for granted where this genre is concerned simply aren't in evidence.

For instance, you can't control your motion or fire once airborne, nor influence the length of your awkwardly arced jumps. You have no ability to crouch, the controls are sluggish, it demands pixel-perfect precision and you often respawn right on top of the enemies that brought you down in the first place, with no period of invincibility for taking evasive action.

The levels are extremely long with no means of saving your progress so you'll have to complete the entire game in one sitting if you're playing via the original hardware; an undertaking that would occupy a competent player for

between one and a half and two hours judging by the longplays recorded for YouTube.

All of which pales into insignificance when we remind ourselves that the entire project was assembled in the space of a month by just three people. A truly remarkable feat given the scope and diversity of all that it incorporates.

Had the critics been aware of this crucial factor at the time of review, it's hard to imagine they would have been quite so harsh in their assessment. Furthermore, ironically, Tony being held in such high esteem by those already familiar with his past accomplishments meant he was expected to raise the bar, whereas a lesser programmer would likely have been cut some slack.

As it was, Amiga Format and Amiga Power concurred in reaching a final verdict of 43%, while CU Amiga weren't that much more enthusiastic, awarding a bottom line of 59%. Beyond its feel-good green sentiments, all three magazines struggled to find anything positive to say about Captain Planet for all the reasons cited in my rundown of the cons above.

As flawed as it is, the game still resonates with those of us - living in one of the 100 different countries in which it was syndicated - who grew up watching the series in the early '90s, and its global legacy lives on today via video game emulation and YouTube.

Given the immense impact of the show, imagine what *might* have been had the development team been granted a more realistic timeframe in which to evolve and refine the game.

While you're at it, stop for a moment to contemplate what might *still* be - staunch environmentalist, Leonardo DiCaprio,

is currently in talks with a view to transforming the cartoon into a live action silver screen blockbuster. Which, if it happened, would no doubt be moulded into an accompanying video game.

It's enough to make the Guardians of the Galaxy turn green with envy... and hopefully delicious, organic, dairy-free, fairtrade, minted pea soup. Preferably poured from a biodegradable, recyclable carton.